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TITLE: AESTHETICS OF FEMINISM IN THE POETRY OF IMTIAZ DHARKER AND CHARMAYNE D'SOUZA: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Submitted by:

Name: Honey Singhal
(Registration No: 13/ Ph.D./026)

Supervisor	**Co-Supervisor**
Name: Dr. Vidushi Sharma Designation: Associate Professor, Dept. of English FCH, MRIU	N/A

ABSTRACT

What is called feminism is woman's sense of reaction against man's dominance in social, political, economic fields of life. It has become a heartfelt desire of every woman in the male dominated world, yet it finds expression in the poetry of modern Indo-English women poets, which is apparent especially in the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza. Effort will be made in this thesis to highlight all those points which are aesthetically important. The most important aesthetic manifestation of these poets is woman's sense of freedom which is twofold – freedom of the body and freedom of the soul. From the stylistic point of view her central concern is use of language, diction and treatment of all concerns in terms of symbolism and imagery. So, the purpose of this dissertation is to take up different themes of feminist concern in the poetry of these poets and relate each theme to the theory of feminism. This study will be a critical study involving the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza that will open up new vista in the poetic output of modern Indo-English poets.

Key Words: Feminism, symbolism, imagery, freedom, aesthetics

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of literature is instruction and delight and the purpose of criticism is how far a piece of literature delights and instructs the reader.

The most ancient works known in Indian literature like the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Ramayana, Kalidasa's Shakuntala etc. having an everlasting charismatic quality reflect towards immense amount of poetic skill inherent in Indian history of literature.

According to the Book of Genesis, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them", And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that move upon the earth". And according to the Upanishads God created a couple out of his Tapa. He gave to the couple the name of 'Prana' and 'Rayee' and he thought that he would fill the earth with offsprings born out of 'prana' and 'rayee', and he did so. In God's plan both man and woman are equal participants in generation, operation and destruction of the universe. No one is inferior to or less than the other. But how come that man enjoys every right to act freely in the universe keeping woman under his subordination. This disparity has given birth to disparity between male female relationships, which is the root cause of all social problems today. Woman has been bearing with patience her secondary fate in the society since time immemorial, but now when she has recognized her importance as an equal participant in the scheme of life, she has opened her mind and soul to be treated by man and society at large on a par with man. She is piloting aeroplanes, driving trucks, buses and locomotives; she has joined army and police to provide internal and external security to her nation. She has become a public servant, a politician, a statesman. There is hardly any job she cannot do justice with. But, with all this why should she suffer a feeling of inferiority in the male world around.

The tradition of feminism remained invisible and never mushroomed as a different and independent genre in India and elsewhere, being always shadowed by patriarchal supremacy. The meaning of feminism has been deconstructed several times and is still contradictory. A French novelist and Philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Second Sex* said, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", which propelled many minds and instigated the

wave of feminism. India marked the presence of the flame of feminism in the post-independence era. The pioneers of this tradition were notably Virginia Woolf (A Room of One's Own, 1929), Mary Wollstonecraft (A Vindication of the rights of woman), Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex, 1949) and Elaine Showalter (Towards a feminist poetics, 1979). Surprisingly, Feminist writings in India were started by men. Rabindranath Tagore's bold female characters in his novels 'Choker Bali' and 'Ghare Bhaire' prove the same. Kamala Das is the first feminist writer to write in English. Chitra Divakar is another name known for her strong feminist ideologies. She wrote Mahabharata in her book *Palace of Illusions* from the perspective of Draupadi. Many more women writers came into light that broke the shackles of society and showed best of their skills freely.

Although feminism has become the heartfelt desire of every woman in the male-dominated world, yet it finds its expression in the poetry of Indo-English women poets, especially in the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza. They can be seen making a search for their identity in the fast progressing social life of Indian democracy. In fact, this is the basic cause for their being creative poets. The present study aims to locate and point out the aesthetics of feminism in the poetry of these two modern Indo-English women poets.

Imtiaz Dharker: Her Life & Awards

Imtiaz Dharker was born in Lahore, Pakistan in 1954. She was brought up in Glasgow, Scotland and then married Anil Dharker and moved to India. She is an M.A. in Philosophy and English Literature. After the death of her first husband, she married Simon Powell and is presently in London. She is a poet, an artist and also a documentary filmmaker. Her documentaries are based on shelter for women, women health and education, and child welfare.

For one of her documentary short films, Dharker was awarded the Silver Lotus Award by the President of India in 1990. Other award-winning documentaries were 'CRY' and 'Impact India'. She was also awarded with Balraj Sahni Award by All India Artists' Association. In December 2014, she has been announced as the winner of Her Majesty's Gold Medal for poetry, which will be presented to her in spring 2015.

Dharker's poetry seems to be a reflection of her own life. Her exposure is very much visible in her multi-faceted poetry. Recurrent themes found in her works make her a global poet. Her poetry delivers expression of freedom, geographical and cultural displacement, journeying, search for identity, diaspora, religious strife and feminism. A Muslim girl's desire for freedom and her helplessness to break the chains of boundaries of religion, customs and patriarchal supremacy are prominently present in her unpolished words in ***Purdah*** (1988). Her art gathers a momentum, which is activated by the oscillation of a woman's two facets i.e., her inner real self and the outer masked self. She has boldly expressed her own experience which is indicated in her use of first person narrative. Dharker has implemented her artistic side in her poetry to make it even more vivid. She has presented poetry in a pictorial way with her sketches which run parallel to the themes of the poems. She also had ten solo exhibitions of her drawings in pen-and-ink.

Dharker, unlimiting her sense, reveals her perception of 'Purdah' by using cut-throat sharp and piercing words. She has strip-teased the fake and fancy picturisation painted by society and has depicted the naked, excruciating and hardcore reality behind the purdah.

Her second book, ***Postcards from God*** (1997) represents the inner turmoil of an individual when exposed to different cultures. Dharker has expressed the experienced dilemma in domestic settings. In this book, Dharker shows God's contemplation on His own creation. Each verse in this book is framed like a scene which is complimented with her powerful drawings, which will be interpreted in this thesis in a new light.

Dharker not only speaks as a muslim woman, but she represents womanhood as a whole. She intends to cross the boundaries of name, religion and nationality. Feeling of rootlessness, lack of freedom in speech, identity crisis, religious anomalies etc. are sensed in her poems in her third book ***I speak for the devil*** (2001). This book explores the condition of women irrespective of geographical boundaries. She has pointed out towards the need to discard the 'purdah' or the 'mangalsutra', not to disobey any religion, but to rise above her inner darkness and subjugated dominance by the society and male counterparts. The very first poem 'Honour killing', criticizes the modified culture imposed on women in the name of God. Her poems expose the fake masks to reveal the real face of society.

In her fourth book ***The terrorist at my table*** (2009), Dharker not only unveils the plight of women but also reveals the growing desire to fight for their rights. This book asks its readers very thoughtful questions pertaining to life and identity in a very bold way. Through her poetry, Dharker imagines a world where terrorist attacks are common and the plight of women is bleak.

In well-structured poems of Dharker's fifth book ***Leaving Fingerprints (***2009) she explores various areas like photography, a recipe, dancing girl Anarkali, Bombay tiffin-boxes – all in the context of women.

Her latest book ***Over the Moon*** (2014), which was published just recently in 2014, is mostly set in London. This consists of a collection of poems presenting love and loss, mourning and celebration, music, church bells, language etc. This book is written after the loss of poet's husband Simon Powell. It talks about both love and loss, and finally attains peace in the form of language which she finds a route to celebration. In form and content this book is maturer than her other books.

Various works by Imtiaz Dharker:

Dharker started a company of video films called 'SOLO' in 1980. These videos were based on architecture, child relief, diseases like leprosy, cancer etc. Till now, she has made more than 300 audio-visuals and films which include 'The Festivals of India', 'Vistara', 'Shelter', 'Sadhana', 'UNICEF', 'CRY', Tata cancer Hospital', 'Impact India', etc.
Dharker's creative output has been extraordinary and that is visible through her drawings, which she showcases through her exhibitions. She started her solo exhibitions in 1982 and the latest one was showcased in 2007.

1. "Purdah" Mumbai (1982)
2. "Borderlines" Mumbai and Delhi (1989)
3. "Living spaces" Mumbai (1992)
4. "Postcards from God" Mumbai, Delhi, Madras, Bangalore (1994)
5. "Random Blue, a parallel life" Mumbai (1996)
6. "Freefall" Mumbai (1999)
7. Solo exhibition, Hong Kong (2007)

Dharker's inclination towards feminism is quite clear and prominent in all her artistic outputs and acts as a vent to let her thoughts reveal to the world. Dharker , indeed is a connoisseur in the field of feminism as her writings, films and drawings too point towards her immense and intense interest towards a woman's feelings, apprehensions and emotions.

Charmayne D'Souza: Her Life & Awards

Charmayne D'Souza, an M.A. in English Literature and also an M.A. in counseling, was born in 1955. Besides her interest in poetry, she practices as a family therapist and as a counselor. She has written only one book named *A Spelling Guide to Woman* – 1991, which is a collection of 45 poems. The title poem points towards her inclination towards women and feminine poetics. She impresses the readers with her simple and subtle way of setting her views. Although her poems are about landscapes, handicapped children, visits to museums, etc., yet her dominant thematic concern is feminism. She has not presented her poetry with embellishments; she rather expresses her poetry with modesty and finds it an automatic and spontaneous outcome. She believes one gets caught in a dilemma after the first publication and the woman feels the pressure of expectations from the society and family. She met Kamala Das, a modern feminist woman poet, and her influence is visible in her work as D'Souza uses sharp irony which moves the reader's mind. Her poetry is filled with a search for identity and she also talks about a woman's natural instinct to fall a prey to man. She feels that even after her death a woman is praised not for her qualities of head and heart but for her physical charms. Major themes imbibed in her poetry include identity crises, treatment of man-woman relationship, marriage, sex, hunger, human body and death.

A Spelling Guide to Woman (1991) is the perfect specimen of Charmayne D'Souza as a modern woman poet. A woman is not considered a woman if she does not "make love" to "make babies" however, for her physical contours she is considered a reserved force, a luxury, to be kept to herself. Her poems are clear and simple, but most of them reflect the predicament of women and the identity crisis of women in a male dominated society.

Various works by Charmayne D'Souza:

1. *Itinerants Mumbai Nomads*– 2009

   Charmayne D'Souza and her photographer husband David D'Souza present the lives of the 'poor' and 'underprivileged' people such as the cotton mattress beaters, the Sufi beggars, the fortune-tellers, the Bandar-wallas, the dabbawallas, members of a 'denotified tribe' etc. This book was produced in free verse with about eighty photographs. Charmayne D'Souza's free verses sometimes dipped in dilemma but are absolutely engrossed in sincerity and confidence. She has painted her words with dark reality of the lives of migrants, but at the same time she delivers her ideas light-heartedly.

Awards:

1. The Aberdeen Arts Council Prize in 1985 and 1986
2. The Midwest Poetry Review Prize
3. Won Bahut Tantrika Kamala Das competition in Bombay

FEMINISM

Feminism is a way which endeavors to analyze literature from the point of view of a woman. How does she view and observe objects around her; how she makes an effort to analyze different things which justify her ego in a medium which is dissimilar from the expression of menfolk. The aesthetics of feminism undoubtedly, is an art which includes a woman's effort to give shape to her experience in a literary and pleasant form. In order to understand her, we have to empathize with her and try to look things from her perspective. Thus, aesthetics of feminism is not a simple affair; its has its own subtleties and complexities which call for a full-fledged study. The purpose of the dissertation is to locate feminism in Indian literary context, develop a hypothesis, and to study its ramifications on modern Indo-English women poets. Effort will be made in this thesis to highlight all those points which are aesthetically important. The most important aesthetic manifestation of the Indo-English women poets is woman's sense of freedom, as an 'Independent woman'. This sense of freedom and emancipation is twofold: the freedom of the body and freedom of the soul. In order to give expression to this freedom she makes use of certain themes. Some of her themes of concern

are: treatment of love, humanism, reaction against the sexist attitude, question of existence in life, sense of loneliness, question of identity, questions involving death, pain, suffering, her attitude to nature, compromise. From the stylistic point of view, her central concern is use of language, diction and treatment of all concerns in terms of symbolism and imagery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature will be reviewed before interpreting the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza. Much research work has not been done on their poetry from a feminist point of view and therefore this study aims at evaluating their poetry in a different perspective. However, **Simone de Beauvoir**, in the book (The Second Sex) explores the plight of women, myths of femininity, and women's liberation. She gave a famous statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"**.** She argues that the key to women's liberation lies in her economic independence as an independent woman.

Eunice de Souza, in her book (Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology) includes biographical introductions on nine Indian women poets of post-independence times which include Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza. She presents a useful insight of contemporary Indian poetry today. She intends to bring forth the level of maturity in the women poets' styles and themes.

In her essay "A Room of One's Own"*,* **Virginia Woolf** suggests that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction". Woolf opines that a woman can show her writing skills only if she is supported financially. She also stresses on freedom in form of personal liberty to a woman to express her writing skills.

K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar, describes the history of Indian English literature at length in his book *Indian Writing in English.* He has talked about the evolution, influences and the changing terminology of Indian English literature. He opines that in Indian English literature, "between the English way and the Indian way" "one achieves the double triumph of honest translation and glorious transformation".

Modern Indian Poetry in English, written by **Bruce King** covers all the prominent modern Indian English poets. He has provided history of poetry, analyzed various poets, and has also critically evaluated selected poems. His book includes all the major poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, Tara Patel, Eunice de Souza, Charmayne D'Souza, Imtiaz Dharker, Jayanta

Mahapatra and many more who have largely contributed to the pool of modern Indian English poetry.

Vidushi Sharma in her research paper "Search for Identity in the Poetry of Modern Indo-English Women Poets" talks about identity crisis in the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker, Mamta Kalia, and Charmayne D'Souza. She has chosen women poets from different religions who talk about the "entire Indian womanhood". She asserts that the search for identity is an important and a common characteristic in modern Indo-English women poets.

"Transmediality in the Work of Imtiaz Dharker: Gendered Spaces in Poetry and Visual Art" by **Sonja Lehmann** expresses Dharker's mutual influence between her poetry and drawings. Lehmann presents his idea of Dharker's poetry getting amplified by her drawings and vice-versa. His major focus is on Dharker's *I speak for the devil*. (2001). He picks up gender issues, cultural differences, and women's struggle for freedom.

Monika Dhillon, in "The Quest for agency and womanhood in poetry of Imtiaz Dharker" argues over marginalization of women, identity crisis, and the need of purdah.

Helen Bowell in her interview with Imtiaz Dharker asks the poet for what made her write poetry to which she replied that poetry for her is an adventure with words and she was always influenced by the idea of words, the beat and the sound.

Suchismita Dutta in her research paper "The prison called 'Home': A Feminist Study of Imtiaz Dharker's *I Speak for the Devil*" says that Dharker has used "some very provocative titles for her poems" to reveal women's desire to protest. She finds continuity in Dharker's first book *Purdah* and second book *I Speak for the Devil*. She has tried to evaluate deep-rooted meanings in the lines and words of Dharker's poems.

DESCRIPTION OF BROAD AREA:

The identity and scope of Indian English literature is still wondered upon with lot of ambiguity, considering its historical evolution. Indian English literature is a significant and fruitful by-product of the western impact on Indian culture. Initiatives were laid by the English-men who chose India as a theme and place to write. It came to be called as Anglo-Indian literature, written by English men of letters like Sir William Jones (1746-94), H.H. Wilson (1786-1860), Sir Edwin Arnold (1832-1904), Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), E.M. Forster (1879-1970) and a few others.

The literature in English created by Indians was called 'Indo-Anglian' literature. This term was popularized by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his book – *Indo-Anglian Literature* published in 1943. The recent Indian writers find a difference between Indo-Anglian and Indo-English. Ezekiel prefers the word 'Indo-English' in place of 'Indo-Anglian'.

Modern Indo-English writers occupy a special domain and form a distinct literary form. Writers displaying strong feelings of cultural misplacement, hopelessness, rootlessness, faithlessness, disintegration, alienation through their writings fall in the category of modern Indo-English Writers. A special place has been taken up by the modern women writers who have willingly picked up poetry as a medium of self-expression, a kind of a window for their pent-up feelings to go out. In this modern hectic life, full of hurries and worries, the analysis of the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza will help in interpreting and evaluating latest dimensions of feminism in India.

A tentative chapter plan will be as follows:

1. Introduction: Indo English Poetry and aesthetics of feminism
2. Formative influences on Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza
3. Feministic approach in the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker
4. Feministic Poetry of Charmayne D'Souza: A Critical Evaluation
5. Style of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza
6. Summing up

OBJECTIVES

1. To locate and point out the feminist aspect in the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza.
2. To justify the poetic output of these poets in Indo-English poetry.
3. To highlight the contribution of modern women poets in the field of feminism.
4. To evaluate their styles of writing and various themes they have implemented.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research plan incorporates a qualitative, explorative and interpretative approach. The poetry of these feminist poets will be critically studied, and interpretation of their individual poems will be made in the context of feminism. It will be seen how these poets are 'unique' in their consciousness of feminism as a whole, and their place in feminism will be underlined and fixed in Indo-English poetry.

The research methodology to be adopted will be after the International patterns as ordained in the MLA handbook (7^{th} edition). The printing font type will be internationally accepted font, Times New Roman 12 points in double space.

PROPOSED RESEARCH OUTCOME

The outcome of the research, it is hoped will be that Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza will be justified to be placed with the mainstream of Indo-English Literature. This study will add to the existing pool of knowledge and will intend to motivate new scholars and researchers in the path of feminism. It will enable the research scholars and even other non-academic readers to understand and appreciate the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker and Charmayne D'Souza in a much better way.

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